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Overview of CLASS as a Tool for Research, Professional Development, and Program Evaluation in PK-3 Classrooms

The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS):

- Is an observational instrument developed at the University of Virginia to assess classroom quality in PK-3 classrooms
- Describes multiple dimensions of teaching that are linked to student achievement and development
- Has been validated in over 2,000 classrooms
- Can be used to reliably assess classroom quality for research and program evaluation
- Provides a tool to help new and experienced teachers become more effective

What dimensions does the CLASS measure?

The CLASS describes 3 broad domains of classroom quality - Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support - that are common across the PK-3 grades. Within each area there are several specific dimensions of classroom quality.

Emotional Support	Classroom Organization	Instructional Support
Positive Climate	Behavior Management	Concept Development
Negative Climate	Productivity	Quality of Feedback
Teacher Sensitivity	Instructional Learning Formats	Language Modeling
Regard for Student Perspectives		Literacy Focus (Pre-k/K only)

Using the CLASS in Research

The CLASS may be used in studies in which researchers want a measure of classroom processes linked to students' performance in those settings as well as their development and behavior over time. The CLASS has been used in large-scale studies of child development and classroom quality, as well as smaller intervention studies. Information on the psychometric properties of the CLASS is available in the technical manual (http://www.classobservation.com/research/class_tech_manual.pdf).

Using the CLASS as a Professional Development Tool

There is a strong need for professional development opportunities for teachers that are ongoing, individualized, collaborative, based on teachers' current classroom practice and students, and designed to improve areas of teaching with direct links to student achievement. The CLASS offers a tool to provide this type of professional development for teachers at all stages of their careers through coursework and mentoring.

Coursework. Teacher educators can use the CLASS and related support materials to:

- Help students create an evidence-based framework of quality teaching
- Focus pre-service teachers on the day-to-day interactions that can really make a difference in their work with students
- Provide video examples of real teachers implementing these high quality teaching strategies in real classrooms

Instructors can provide access to the CLASS video library and use the CLASS training module to help familiarize their students with high quality teaching practices. These videos can also serve as the basis for classroom discussion, homework assignments, and field placement assignments. Pre-service teachers who have participated in these experiences report that they have a much better understanding of what good teaching actually looks like. Here's what some University of Virginia teacher education students had to say about seeing CLASS video examples:

"It made me realize how important a teacher's voice tone, language and ability to adapt to the children's interest was by viewing both successful and unsuccessful circle times. The teacher's behavior determined the success of the lesson."

"...I have a better idea of what quality teaching actually is. Before, it just seemed like a phrase constantly used in books with little applicability. Now I have specific criteria and concrete examples off which to base my perceptions."

Mentoring. Staff at the Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) have developed an innovative professional development system for working with teachers throughout their careers called the MyTeachingPartner(MTP) Consultancy. Unlike most other professional development opportunities for experienced teachers, which typically consist of attending workshops, in the MTP Consultancy, teachers receive individualized professional development within the context of the teacher-consultant relationship that focuses on teachers' own classroom practices. Importantly, the MTP Consultancy is specifically focused on improving the dimensions of Quality Teaching described by CLASS. Teachers who participate in the consultancy also receive access to the interactive MTP website. For more information or how to get involved, visit the MyTeachingPartner website (www.myteachingpartner.org). Here are some comments from current MTP teachers:

"It's great to have someone to bounce ideas off of, reflect on my practice, and get feedback from."

"Having a consultant made me more reflective and focused on what I need to do each day."

"My consultant is a second pair of eyes, able to look beyond the surface to see things that make me think about my class."

Using the CLASS for Program Development and Evaluation

There is increasing pressure on administrators at all levels (e.g., principals, superintendents, department of education staff) to provide evidence that their classrooms provide high quality experiences for young children and promote positive academic outcomes. The CLASS provides a theory-based and empirically validated tool for providing this evidence.

Importantly, the CLASS can be used not only to assess the degree of emotional, organizational, and instructional supports in classrooms but to help improve them as well. For example, by administering the CLASS within all classrooms in a country-wide preschool program, administrators may identify program strengths and develop plans for making systematic improvements in areas of weakness. Programs may find that their teachers display high quality social-emotional climates and management but are weaker in the instructional areas and thus plan for a set of workshops aimed at improving teacher knowledge and implementation of high-quality instructional strategies.

How do I learn to use the CLASS?

The CLASS is a multifaceted observation system that requires in-depth training for appropriate use. The level of training required depends on the intended use of the system. If you are interested in using the CLASS to collect standardized data on classrooms, for research, accountability, or evaluation purposes, it is essential for all observers to attend training and pass a reliability test. More information about options for CLASS training is available at http://www.classobservation.com/training/training_prek.php.

For more information on CLASS
please visit
www.classobservation.com

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